

## **INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR - SOCIAL SERVICES OF GENERAL INTEREST AND TERRITORIAL COHESION: EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES**

13<sup>th</sup> November 2017, CCDR Alentejo, Évora

### **Conclusions – Morning**

#### **Panel I: The challenges of services of general interest in Post-2020 Europe**

The theme of services of general interest (SGI) as a factor of equity and territorial cohesion has been the subject of reflection in the last two decades. Defined as "market and non-market services that public entities classify as being of general interest and subject to public obligations" (CEC, 2003), they are mentioned in the "Green paper on services of general interest" as a "key element of the model European partnership "to enable social groups and the most vulnerable regions to access services of general interest. SGIs should "ensure a harmonious mix of market mechanisms and public service missions" (EC, 2003) and therefore must reach the criteria of: universality, continuity, quality of service, availability at affordable cost and protection of use and consumption.

Following the Green Paper (2003) and the White Paper on Services of General Interest (2004), the Commission launches the Communication '*Implementing the Community Lisbon program: Social services of general interest in the European Union*' (2006). Clarify the specific nature of social services at European level by presenting a set of characteristics which define these services as being of general interest. Thus, social services of general interest (SSGI) are defined as being generally provided in a personalized way to guarantee solutions for the needs of the vulnerable population, based on the principles of solidarity and equal access. They may be economic or non-economic, including non-profit organizations, in that the classification of economic activity depends essentially on how the activity is carried out, organized and financed, rather than on the legal status of the provider. The services included here are: (i) compulsory and supplementary social security schemes, covering social risks such as illness, old age, accidents at work, unemployment, disability or disability; among others; (ii) other services provided directly to the population, playing a key role in prevention and social cohesion, based on personalized assistance to facilitate social inclusion and safeguard fundamental rights – e.g. SSGI services, employment and vocational training, social housing or health care (including long-term care).

The following year the Commission takes in account the ongoing process of the European commitment on services of general interest, "*A single market for 21st century Europe - Services of general interest, including social services of general interest: a new European commitment*". In this document, which still serves as a reference today, GIS are divided into two categories which are subject to different European rules: 1. services of general economic interest (SGEI), which are provided against payment and are subject to European rules the internal market and competition (transport and communications infrastructures, energy, employment / training); 2. non-economic services, such as education, health, culture, sport, justice, for e.g., and compulsory social security schemes, which are not covered by specific European legislation or by internal market and competition rules. In practice, the functioning of these services differs between Member States, leading to this distinction requiring a detailed analysis of each activity. It also presents social services of general interest, as formulated in the 2006 Communication

Among the factors that explain this interest in the theme are the economic crisis that affected the financing and performance of these services and accelerated the transformations in the various social models that dominate the European framework. On the other hand, the disparities in land use due to population aging and the spread of low density areas, with all the inherent problems in terms of scarce demand and difficulties in achieving economic efficiency levels, bring to the debate the need to ensure the provision of services of a social and economic nature in a territory where the small size of the demand does not ensure the minimum levels for the provision of services in a market logic.

Among the elements to be taken into account, in addition to the availability of the service, the accessibility and access criteria stand out, whose distinction is fundamental for the discussion of equity and territorial cohesion.

It is in this context that it is fundamental to reflect on ways of measuring this benefit, both in terms of indicators to be used and in terms of methodologies and criteria to be considered. The scarcity of indicators and the complexity resulting from the combination of criteria highlight the limitations of the indicators, justifying the need to deepen the studies on the subject with regard to their role for territorial cohesion. Taking as an example, the case of health, the simple consideration of indicators that evaluate the availability of services through the number of equipment per 1000 inhabitants, the number of doctors per 1000 inhabitants, or even of the existence of valences per 1000 inhabitants, accessible by network to a large percentage of the inhabitants of the region, does not in any way reflect

the problem of access to the service. First, the availability of equipment and valence may not occur, either physically or temporarily, evenly across the territory. Second, particularly in contexts of low density and population aging, the issue of physical distance increases, as do other factors such as the financial capacity of the population to travel (a evident fact in low-income populations, including the elderly) or the (un)availability of public transport with the necessary frequency to respond to the criterion of equity in access (which discriminates against the population that does not have its own mode).

The presentations of the morning session have allowed these questions to be deepened, with similarities within the European framework, when the efficiency thresholds are sought to ensure universality of access to services, framed in very different geographical and socio-economic contexts.

The presentation by Daniel Rauhut (Karelian Institute), entitled *SSGI Provision and Territorial Cohesion: Nordic Experiences and Challenges*, underlined the existence of deficits in the provision of public services in some regions of Sweden, Finland and Norway, with a lower population density and with less accessibility to medium-sized urban centers. To these two factors are added the changes that occurred in the service delivery model, namely in education and health, where there was an assertion of private financing, replacing the State as service provider.

The presentation by Erik Gloersen (Geneva University), *Social services of general interest and the challenges of territorial cohesion - the role of Cohesion Policy*, reinforced the aspects presented above, emphasizing in particular the difficulty of cohesion policy to have a role in the provision of the service, and its performance will be achieved by improving the factors that condition access.

Sabrina Lucatelli (Government of Italy), with: *A strategy for inner areas in Italy*, presented an interesting methodology to define areas of low density / low economic growth, identifying the conditions of the territory that go beyond the demographic criterion and defending the issue of proximity in providing services as a key element for equity and territorial cohesion. Throughout the afternoon, the discussion topics were maintained, so we found some common points that should be highlighted in the development of future intervention strategies:

- Addressing the diversity of services of general interest, knowing that this diversity requires

adaptation and adjustment of the solutions according to the type of service and the characteristics of the territory in which it occurs;

- Discuss the importance of proximity services as a factor of equity, especially in low density territories, forcing a re-look at the ways in which we promote their provision. Mix-functional and the full use of information and communication technologies appear as frequently referenced solutions. But how to provide them in the framework of the national settlement system and considering the future trends of demographic evolution of the country;

- Consider the heterogeneity of services with differentiated demand or services of a higher hierarchical level. The situations are very different when we talk about health (e.g. hospital), education (e.g. university) or culture (multipurpose pavilion), showing the sensitivity of these services to the scale in which they operate, the competencies of the entities and the existing governance structure;

- Distinguish the intervention options from the differences between accessibility and access. The consideration of accessibility as one of the criteria for policy making implies a complementary reading on the efficiency of the transport system, while at the same time, it implies a reflection on the location of the services. The location cannot be strictly dependent on population thresholds, but rather on the real-time distance, using public transport mode, to which the services are located;

Considering these aspects, it is fundamental to think about **which territories we want and what options to take, issues that are intertwined with the territorial strategies and governance models to be implemented**. It is in this context that the relevance of the next seminar is underlined, where these issues will be taken up again.

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